1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DEVIANTS AND DEFECTIVES

i

Except when I have used individual illustrations the four chapters of Book Two have been written about an abstraction called 'the average Lepcha'. Of course such an abstraction has no more real existence than 'the average man' or 'the man in the street' dear to European and American journalists; he is a compromise between the ideal personality set up for the Lepchas by themselves and the observable behaviour of the majority of the Lepchas in Lingthém. It is the Lepcha stereotype who has been described.

The Lepcha stereotype is unaggressive, sociable, hard-working, constantly good-humoured, greatly interested in direct consumption (eating, drinking and copulation), fundamentally optimistic. The relationship of the Lepcha stereotype with his fellows is based rationally on mutual benefits and obligations; very little stress is placed on personal affection and practically no interest is taken in, and no allowance made for, individual character or temperament. The Lepcha insists very firmly on the independence of the adult individual and the family group; no attempt is made to dominate or exploit others, and any attempt by others to dominate or exploit is resisted as actively as the rules of the culture permit. The Lepcha identifies himself strongly with his family group and with his immediate community—the village; the identification with the tribe as a whole is much less strong, and one of the Lepchas' chief social weaknesses is that, except in the case of serious crime, the Mandal and inhabitants of one village have little influence over the inhabitants of any other village under a different Mandal. The Lepcha stereotype calls for a very gradual emergence of responsibility and almost unquestioning confidence from younger people in their elders.

Although this stereotype does not, I think, correspond exactly to the behaviour or attitudes of any one person, it is not for that

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

114 travel in the interior of the country. As an ethnologist I bitterly regretted this decision: but as a friend of the country I fully sympathised with His Highness's orders. If the policy of excluding strangers from Nepal is ever changed (which seems unlikely), I hope that I may be one of the first to benefit from it: but for the present no one who has seen the disastrous results of the contact of Western civilisation with some of the more primitive peoples of India can doubt the wisdom of Nepal's rulers.

In the meantime I was forced to consider other alternatives. It had always been my intention eventually to spend some time among the people of the Tibetan border. There are many Nepalese settlers in Sikkim, and I hoped, after seeing the people in their own country, to find out how they adjusted their lives when they came in contact with another culture. Also, there were the Lepchas, a shy and retiring people, said to be rapidly dying out, who claim to be the original inhabitants of the country. While I was still in Nepal I discussed plans with the British Minister, Colonel Bailey (some of whose earlier wanderings resulted in the first discovery of the blue poppy, *Meconopsis Baileyii*, which now thrives even in Hyde Park). He had been for many years Political Officer in Sikkim and knew the country intimately. It was from him that I first heard of the Talung Valley. Although he had not himself visited it he told me that it was the one purely Lepcha place still in existence. In all other 144 parts of Sikkim the people had intermarried with Tibetans 177 and Nepalis to such an extent that they had lost all traces of 619 tribal consciousness. Not so, however, in the Talung; for this valley formed part of the Maharaja's personal estate and none but Lepchas were permitted to own land or to settle in it.

114 On our return from Everest I talked the matter over with 609 the Maharaja. His Highness said he had no objection to my spending some months in the valley; but warned me that it might be difficult to get on speaking terms with the people, who had the reputation of being extremely shy and of

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

773 Tarbong Pu; the first woman Nari Pu. They lived on the twin peaks beyond Seniolchum; and from them all the races of man, including the Lepchas, are descended.

* * * * *

614 The Lepcha tribe is composed of a number of clans, called
619 *pu-tso*. No one can say how many clans there are, for this grouping seems to be a purely local one. In the Kalimpong district I recorded the names of over forty different clans, but in Lingtem there were but fourteen, all of them different from those I had already collected. There does not appear ever to have been any sort of tribal organisation, nor even a tribal leader; and while I use the word clan to denote these collections of people, it would be better to regard them as merely belonging to one large family, which is in fact what
614 they are. We shall probably never know what functions the clan formerly possessed, but its sole use nowadays is in regulating marriage, it being impossible for a man to marry a girl of the same *pu-tso* as his own. Ethnologists call this custom exogamy: but Lepcha exogamy is of a special kind, for it does permit a man to marry a relative of his father provided the relationship is removed by five (but some say seven) generations. Such a marriage is of course only possible with a person descended through the father's sister, since she, having married into another clan, belongs to a different *pu-tso*. In the case of a marriage between the descendants of two sisters a separation of only three generations is demanded. In actual practice all this means is that any two related people, provided they do not both belong to the same clan, may marry provided the relationship between them is sufficiently distant as to have been forgotten for all practical purposes.

Most people know the story of how their own clan originated, and these myths have probably been reinterpreted many times. There is a great similarity between them, but the following is a typical example.

Up towards the mountains there is a big cliff on which

7: Hooker D-5 (1849-1851) 1854
AK5 Lepcha AK5

Before proceeding to narrate my different expeditions into Sikkim and Nepal from Dorjiling, I shall give a sketch of the different peoples and races composing the heterogeneous population of Sikkim and the neighbouring mountains.

The Lepcha is the aboriginal inhabitant of Sikkim, and the prominent character in Dorjiling, where he undertakes all sorts of out-door employment. The race to which he belongs is a very singular one; markedly Mongolian in features, and a good deal too, by imitation, in habit; still he differs from his Tibetan prototype, though not so decidedly as from the Nepalese and Bhotanese, between whom he is hemmed into a narrow tract of mountain country, barely 60 miles in breadth. The Lepchas possess a tradition of the flood, during which a couple escaped to the top of a mountain (Tendong) near Dorjiling. The earliest traditions which they have of their history date no further back than some three hundred years, when they describe themselves as having been long-haired, half-clad savages. At about that period they were visited by Tibetans, who introduced Boodh worship, the platting of their hair into pig-tails, and very many of their own customs. Their physiognomy is however so Tibetan in its character, that it cannot be supposed that this was their earliest intercourse with the trans-nivean races: whether they may have wandered from beyond the snows before the spread of Boodhism and its civilisation, or whether they are a cross between the Tamulian of India and the Tibetan, has not been decided. Their language, though radically identical with Tibetan, differs from it in many important particulars. They, or at least some of their tribes, call themselves Rong, and Arratt, and their country Dijong: they once possessed a great part of East Nepal, as far west as the Tambur river, and at a still earlier period they penetrated as far west as the Arun river.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

in other places. The Rong women are not so simple as to be taken in by such a man-made legend. They, on the contrary, affirm that the sexual maturity of girls and the development of the secondary sex characteristics occur without sexual relationship with man. The only difference is that the breasts of the girl who had had sexual relationship with man would produce some milk. The Maharaja of Sikkim and other educated Sikkimese, who read Gorer's book, found his description to be a defamation of the Lepcha character.

The Lepchas are the descendants of the first brother Lepcha, as reported above. They fall into three divisions, which are named after the districts in which they live. The Ilame Lepchas live in the Ilame district of Nepal; the Dandjung Lepchas on the other side of the Tista river in Sikkim; the Dam-sang Lepchas in Indian Sikkim and Bhutan. The second brother was called God-she, and is the father of the Jimdar tribe. The third was Meche, and he is the protoparent of the Meche. Each of these three have a different language.[112]

B. Sikkim Yak-tamba

There is in Sikkim a class of people who are called Limbu by the Nepalese and Tzong-pa by the Tibetans. They call themselves Yak-tamba, Ek-tamba and Ek-tambu. Tradition has it that, after the Lepchas, they are the oldest inhabitants of the place having settled there before the Tibetans and the Nepalese came to settle in the land. They are intermixed with the Rong in a very remarkable manner. At the present time they inhabit the land to the west as far as the river Arun as we have already pointed out before. They are regarded as divisions of the Limbu and bear a very close resemblance to them. The Yak-tamba have flatter faces and more Mongoloid features than the Lepchas.

C. The Bhodja of Sikkim

The Tibetans who migrated into Sikkim are called the Sikkim Bhodja. Legend links the Tibetan Je-khye-bu-

112. cfr. the report of the Rai given above concerning the first parents and their three sons; see p. 7, 38. Here we have the same content of the myth.

[pp. 110 – 159 not processed]